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DEPT FOR HAITI TASK FORCE

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SUBJECT: UNESCO ASKS US TO PROTECT HAITI'S MUSEUMS

¶1. Summary. UNESCO contacted U.S. Mission UNESCO and the Department, January 25, seeking help to protect and preserve Haiti's cultural artifacts. Citing the large U.S. military presence in Haiti, the UNESCO Culture Section asked whether some U.S. troops could be deployed to protect cultural sites and museums. UNESCO agreed to coordinate their preservation efforts with the appropriate UN offices in New York and Port au Prince and provide additional information on UN plans for managing this task. End Summary.

¶2. UNESCO, concerned about possible looting of damaged museums and cultural sites in Haiti, is seeking assistance from the U.S. and other states to secure those sites. Karalyn Monteil, UNESCO Museums and Cultural Section officer, asked that the U.S. dedicate some of its forces to protecting Haiti's cultural heritage. She reported that UNESCO plans to send an inter-sectoral mission to Haiti in early February. They are contacting INTERPOL, the World Customs Organization (WCO), the specialized French (Office Centrale de lute Contre le trafic de Biens Culturels) and Italian police forces for the protection of cultural heritage (Carabinieri), the International Council of Museums (ICOM), the International Committee of the Blue Shield (ICBS) and the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) in order to coordinate emergency plans and actions. UNESCO is also mobilizing the cultural and artistic community in Haiti to form a local network of expertise for reconstruction efforts in the culture field.

¶3. Following up on Department's request for information on UN system coordination, Deputy Chief of Mission asked UNESCO Deputy Assistant Director General Morgens Schmidt, head of the Haiti Assistance Task Force, whether the UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) would be coordinating protection of cultural property in Haiti and whether he could provide information contact information. Schmidt said that UNESCO is contacting the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) in New York and MINUSTAH today, January 26, to arrange for the UN to take on the role of coordinating international efforts to protect cultural property in Haiti. He undertook to obtain additional information.

¶4. Note. While MINUSTAH makes arrangements to coordinate this effort, we note that coordination was stressed by the UN at the "Friends of Haiti" meeting yesterday in Montreal. UN officials there said that coordination is complicated by the number of people working on the ground, many new to the country, who have different backgrounds, priorities and perspectives. To address this, the UN joint operations and tasking centre - comprising the UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), MINUSTAH, the United States military and the Canadian military - will officially begin work today. End note)

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